

REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Literacy
June 2020

Question:

What early reading instructional practices support successful independent reading for early elementary students?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about early reading instruction. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on early reading instructional practices that support independent reading proficiency for early elementary students. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

Foorman, B., Beyler, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., Furgeson, J., Hayes, L., Henke, J., Justice, L., Keating, B., Lewis, W., Sattar, S., Streke, A., Wagner, R., & Wissel, S. (2016). *Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED566956>

From the guide: “The goal of this practice guide is to offer educators specific, evidence-based recommendations for teaching foundational reading skills to students in kindergarten through 3rd grade. This guide is a companion to the existing practice guide, ‘Improving

Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade’, and as a set, these guides offer recommendations for preparing students to be successful readers. Both guides recommend some practices that can and should be implemented beginning in kindergarten, and both guides also suggest some instructional practices that can be implemented after students have mastered early reading skills. This guide synthesizes the best available research on foundational reading skills and shares practices that are supported by evidence. It is intended to be practical and easy for teachers to use. The guide includes many examples in each recommendation to demonstrate the concepts discussed. This guide provides teachers, reading coaches, principals, and other educators with instructional recommendations that can be implemented in conjunction with existing standards or curricula and does not recommend a particular curriculum. Teachers can use the guide when planning instruction to support the development of foundational reading skills among students in grades K–3 and in diverse contexts. Professional-development providers, program developers, and researchers can also use this guide. Professional-development providers can use the guide to implement evidence-based instruction and align instruction with state standards or to prompt teacher discussion in professional learning communities. Program developers can use the guide to create more effective early-reading curricula and interventions. Finally, researchers may find opportunities to test the effectiveness of various approaches to foundational reading education and explore gaps or variations in the reading-instruction literature.”

Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C. M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., & Tilly, W. D. (2009). *Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades* (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED504264>

From the guide: “Response to Intervention (RtI) is a comprehensive early detection and prevention strategy that identifies struggling students and assists them before they fall behind. RtI systems combine universal screening and high-quality instruction for all students with interventions targeted at struggling students. This guide offers five specific recommendations to help educators identify struggling readers and implement evidence-based strategies to promote their reading achievement. Teachers and reading specialists can utilize these strategies to implement RtI and multi-tier intervention methods and frameworks at the classroom or school level. Recommendations cover how to screen students for reading problems, design a multi-tier intervention program, adjust instruction to help struggling readers, and monitor student progress. Note that this guide focuses on screening and interventions for struggling readers; it does not provide recommendations for general classroom reading instruction.”

Henbest, V. S., & Apel, K. (2017). Effective word reading instruction: What does the evidence tell us? *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 39(1), 303–311. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1156527>

From the abstract: “This article is a report of recent evidence on methods for teaching young and struggling readers to read words. Specifically, evidence comparing synthetic and analytic

phonics instruction was reviewed as well as the benefit of instruction in encoding and morphological awareness. The evidence reviewed suggests that instruction in synthetic and analytic phonics are both effective methods for teaching word reading to young and struggling readers and the inclusion of encoding in early reading instruction may provide added benefit. Furthermore, several investigations have found instruction in morphological awareness to be beneficial for improving young students' word reading. More research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of incorporating encoding and morphological awareness instruction into early reading programs.”

Lane, H. (2014). *Evidence-based reading instruction for grades K–5* (Document No. IC-12). Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center. Retrieved from https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/IC-12_FINAL_12-15-14.pdf

From the report: “This paper features an innovation configuration (IC) matrix that can guide teacher preparation professionals in the development of appropriate use of evidence-based reading instruction for Grades K–5...This paper elucidates the research and its application to instruction. Each essential element, instructional activity, and strategy shared (see Appendix) is supported by research. This paper reviews the basic knowledge and skills required by K–5 teachers to teach diverse students to read.”

McNamara, S. D., & Kendeou, P. (2011). Translating advances in reading comprehension research to educational practice. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 4(1), 33–46. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1068606>

From the abstract: “The authors review five major findings in reading comprehension and their implications for educational practice. First, research suggests that comprehension skills are separable from decoding processes and important at early ages, suggesting that comprehension skills should be targeted early, even before the child learns to read. Second, there is an important distinction between reading processes and products, as well as their causal relationship: processes lead to certain products. Hence, instructional approaches and strategies focusing on processes are needed to improve students' reading performance (i.e., product). Third, inferences are a crucial component of skilled comprehension. Hence, children need scaffolding and remediation to learn to generate inferences, even when they know little about the text topic. Fourth, comprehension depends on a complex interaction between the reader, the characteristics of the text, and the instructional task, highlighting the need for careful selection of instructional materials for individual students and specific groups of students. Finally, educators may benefit from heightened awareness of the limitations and inadequacies of standardized reading comprehension assessments, as well as the multidimensionality of comprehension to better understand their students' particular strengths and weaknesses.”

Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED512029>

From the guide: “Strong reading comprehension skills are central not only to academic and professional success, but also to a productive social and civic life. These skills build the capacity to learn independently, to absorb information on a variety of topics, to enjoy reading, and to experience literature more deeply. Despite the growing demand for highly educated workers in today’s information- and service-related economies, the proportion of American adults classified as ‘below basic’ readers remained remarkably constant between 1992 and 2003. This guide, developed by a panel of experts, presents a set of evidence-based practices that teachers and other educators can use to successfully teach reading comprehension to young readers. The panel believes that students who read with understanding at an early age gain access to a broader range of texts, knowledge, and educational opportunities, making early reading comprehension instruction particularly critical. The guide also describes the evidence that supports the practices and gives examples of how they can be implemented in the classroom.”

Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult

Ask A REL Mid-Atlantic at Mathematica. (2020). *What are the best research-based guided reading programs/resources?* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/askarel_126.asp

Ask A REL Northwest at Education Northwest. (2018). *What does the research say about supplementing whole-classroom reading instruction with skill-specific small-group intervention for increasing elementary reading achievement?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/askarel/reading-instruction.asp>

Ask A REL West at WestEd. (2019). *What does the research say about instructional approaches to “close reading” for elementary students?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/Ask/Details/87>

Additional Organizations to Consult

Evidence for ESSA: <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

From the website: “Our goal is to provide clear and authoritative information on programs that meet the ESSA evidence standards and enable educators and communities to select effective educational tools to improve student success.”

- Reading programs: <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/programs/reading>

National Center on Improving Literacy: <https://improvingliteracy.org/>

From the website: “The National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL) is a partnership among literacy experts, university researchers, and technical assistance providers, with funding from the United States Department of Education. Our Mission is to increase access to, and use of, evidence-based approaches to screen, identify, and teach students with literacy-related disabilities, including dyslexia.”

Reading Rockets: <https://www.readingrockets.org/>

From the website: “Reading Rockets is a national public media literacy initiative offering information and resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how caring adults can help. We bring the best research-based strategies to teachers, parents, administrators, librarians, childcare providers, and anyone else involved in helping a young child become a strong, confident reader. Our goal is to bring the reading research to life — to spread the word about reading instruction and to present ‘what works’ in a way that parents and educators can understand and use. Reading Rockets’ mission is to take that research-based and best-practice information and make it available to as many people as possible through the power and reach of television and the Internet.”

What Works Clearinghouse: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

From the website: “The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) reviews the existing research on different programs, products, practices, and policies in education. Our goal is to provide educators with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions. We focus on the results from high-quality research to answer the question ‘What works in education?’”

- Literacy: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW/Results?filters=Literacy>

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- elementary AND (read* OR “early read*” OR “begin* read*”) AND (practice* OR instruct* OR strat* OR approach*)
- elementary AND (read* OR “early read*” OR “begin* read*”) AND (practice* OR instruct* OR strat* OR approach*) AND (outcome* OR effect* OR proficien* OR impact*)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover information available within the last 10 years, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Reference sources: IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols receive highest priority. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on June 1, 2020. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.